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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COTONOU 000219

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DEPT FOR AF/W DBANKS
PARIS AND LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BN](#)
SUBJECT: BENIN: PEACEFUL LOCAL ELECTIONS AGAINST BACKGROUND OF
IRREGULARITIES

REF: (A) COTONOU 201 (B) COTONOU 104 (C) COTONOU 43 (D) 07 COTONOU
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11. (U) SUMMARY: On April 20, 2008, Benin held its second set of municipal and local elections since 1990. Early results point to a defeat for President Yayi's new Force Cowrie for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) party in Cotonou and Porto-Novo. FCBE did better in the north where preliminary results indicate it held on to the Mayor's office in Parakou. In general voters cast their ballots peacefully, but encountered several problems with missing or improperly printed ballots at the polls. This resulted in the suspension of voting at some polling stations in southern Benin. Reports from the embassy's election observation teams found some voting irregularities, but none which marred the overall fairness of the elections. END SUMMARY.

Elections Get Off to a Late Start

12. (U) While voting for municipal and local elections should have started at 7:00 am on April 20, it began in earnest around 9:00 am at many polling stations while other polling stations did not open until much later. The late start was due primarily to late delivery of voting materials. In Cotonou, the Ambassador informed CENA First Vice President Mansourou Moudachirou that she had observed ten polling stations all of which started late due to absence of the mandatory number of officials required and/or late delivery of polling materials. He said northern Benin was in better shape, because the military had delivered materials much earlier but acknowledged distribution problems in the south. In Porto-Novo, election workers told PolOff they did not receive their supplies until 3:00 am and then had only 4 hours to try to transfer them to several hundred polling places in the city. According to press reports, voting materials did not arrive in northern Benin until 8:00 am on Election Day.

3.(U) In addition to a late start, a lack of voting materials impacted voting across Benin. At some polling stations, poll workers suspended voting because of ballot shortage. Embassy observers also found misprinted ballot papers, the absence of poll workers, and confusion about the duration of the polling during their observations. (Note: the law says polling should last 9 hours whereas some poll workers mistakenly kept polls open for 10 hours due to an error in the manual used by the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENA). End note). Workers at most election sites also had to construct improvised voting booths which often offered little privacy for voters.

13. (U) Faced with voting problems in several localities that made it impossible to conduct the election in the time frame prescribed by the law, the CENA suspended and then cancelled voting in those

localities. A source from the CENA told the embassy that the CENA is expected to meet to examine the issue and decide whether to re-schedule the voting in the affected areas. While most problems were relatively minor, the police arrested the president of a Local Independent Electoral Commission (CEC) in Glazoue (central Benin) when he was found allegedly stuffing ballot boxes.

¶4. (U) President Yayi, after voting, acknowledged in a public statement that there were flaws in CENA's work. He pledged to introduce proposals for a reform of the electoral system.

Early Results

¶5. (U) According to partial results reported in the press, the former President Nicephore Soglo's Renaissance of Benin (RB) party is ahead in Cotonou, followed by the Party of Democratic Renewal (PRD) and then President Yayi's Front Cowry for an Emerging Benin (FCBE). In Parakou, Yayi's FCBE is said to have obtained the majority of the council seats while PRD remains ahead in its Porto-Novo stronghold. The CENA is still proceeding with a tabulation of the official results.

The Embassy's Observation Effort

¶7. (U) The embassy deployed five teams to observe the polling in the southern Beninese cities of Cotonou, Ouidah, Seme and Porto-Novo.

Comment

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¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: While irregularities marred voting in several localities and there was a general lack of adequate voting materials, the elections appear, for the most part, to have been conducted in a fair and transparent manner. The apparent failure of President Yayi's FCBE to win control of Cotonou is a serious setback for Yayi. He and his ministers campaigned hard, and in the end failed to wrest control of Cotonou from RB. While it appears FCBE won across northern Benin, and may hold a majority of Benin's city halls, RB and PRD will probably be re-energized to fight a president who, until now, had been riding on the coattails of his overwhelming victory in 2006. END COMMENT.

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